

## VOTE - Voter Outreach Through Education Washington Secretary of State

### UNITED STATES AND WORLD CURRICULUM GRADES 8-12

#### TEACHER: LESSON 1

#### THEME: PARTICIPATION IS THE CORNERSTONE TO DEMOCRACY

The very word "democracy" supports the theme above. Broken apart, it means "the people" (Greek: Demos) "rule" (cracy). We have tried in our Constitution to avoid "plutocracy" (ruled by the rich), "autocracy" (rule by a leader's whim, not the law), and "aristocracy" (rule by a privileged few).

The essential role of the DEMOS (citizens) in our democracy might warrant closer examination. This lesson will help students confront what others before us have said about this theme. It would be helpful if you can provide each student with a copy of the Declaration of Independence and the Bill of Rights for reference. Small pocket books with both are often available for free by contacting your Congressman, the League of Women Voters or other such interested organizations. These items are also often found in the back of history texts.

The following passage and quotes (1-4) are offered as a way to engage students in an examination of their critical and assumed role in the democratic process. They may be used as class discussions and/or as writing assignments.

#### ACTIVITY:

1. "...governments are instituted [created] among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed." (Declaration of Independence)

Students could be asked to answer some or all of these questions:

- A. Explain, with examples, the ways that citizens have the ability to express their consent (or dissent) to decisions and actions made by governmental leaders at the school, city, county, state, and national levels.
- B. What are the key words in this passage from the Declaration of Independence?
- C. Who are the governed of whom the Declaration of Independence speaks?
- D. What is the relationship between "just powers" and "consent of the governed?"
- E. Offer and defend the explanation of why the authors of the Declaration of Independence chose to include the passage.
- F. What message is there in these words for each new generation to apply?

2. "There is no happiness without liberty, no liberty without self-government..." (The Federalist Papers, introduction by Clinton Rossiter)

Clinton Rossiter wrote these words in support of the creation of a political experiment, our nation. Support the view with examples, analogies, or evidence. Students should be asked to divide into three teams, one to defend Rossiter's view, the other to disagree with it, another to act as a jury to decide which made the better case.

The following questions can be assigned to be included as points to address in the above debate, assigned for writing, or for small group discussion and report findings to the class:

- A. Do you agree with Clinton Rossiter? Can citizens be just as happy without liberty? Can liberty exist without self-government?
- B. What might the connection be between liberty and self-government or between happiness and self-government? Can you cite any examples when loss of self-government resulted in a loss of liberty?
- C. Does self-government mean you will always be happy with governmental decisions? What is your reasoning? What is the solution if you are unhappy?

3. "The cure for the ills of democracy is more democracy." (President Woodrow Wilson)

Students can be asked to write these answers individually (at home or in class) and then in class, break the students into three groups and assign one question set to each group to pool individual responses into a group answer. Each group should elect a spokesperson to present its findings to the class.

- A. At first glance this may seem contradictory, a sort of paradox, but look closely: what could President Wilson have meant when he said this?
- B. How does this view correlate with the Declaration of Independence passage and the quote by Rossiter?
- C. Our democracy provides certain tools (means) to correct the problems it creates. For example: the right to petition the government for change in Amendment One; the right to run for Congress in Article One of the Constitution. What are at least two other tools in our democracy for implementing change in our leaders and laws? Be sure to look at the Amendments and at presidential powers in Article Two.
- D. Like any tools, these need someone to utilize them for there to be any results. In the vision of the authors of the Declaration of Independence and framers of our Constitution and government, who are the workers that use the tools?

4. "The science of government is my duty to study...that my sons may have liberty to study mathematics and philosophy." (President Thomas Jefferson)

This activity is suitable for working in groups of two, three, or individually:

- A. Compare or contrast quotation four with views expressed in numbers one, two, and three. Does President Jefferson support or contradict the other views? Explain your reasoning.
- B. What would President Jefferson say to citizens who leave "politics" to others?
- C. He raises the word "duty;" what duty is he implying for all citizens? List all the duties you think should be assumed by each citizen and explain?